

## SIR JOHN ELIOT, BART., M.D., OF PEEBLES, AND SOME OF HIS FRIENDS.

By R. W. INNES SMITH, M.D. Edin., Sheffield.

IN the Parish Churchyard of Hatfield, Hertfordshire, there is the following Monumental Inscription :—

“Near this place lie interred the remains of John Eliot, Baronet, late an eminent physician in London. He was born in Edinburgh in the year MDCCXXXVI where he had the first rudiments of his education, which he further improved during his residence in France and Holland. He died at Brochet Hall, the seat of his friend Lord Melbourne, on the 7th November MDCCLXXVII [sic] having before his death given directions that he should be buried in the churchyard of the place where he should happen to die.”

“Thus when the poison'd shafts of death are sped  
The plant of Gilead bows her head  
The Holy Balm that heal'd another's pain,  
On her own wound distils its charm in vain.”

JERNINGHAM.

“His uncle William Davidson of Muirhouse near Edinburgh caused this monument to be erected.”

A short biographical sketch of Sir John Eliot appears in *Munk's Roll* of the Royal College of Physicians of London. Munk credits him with the authorship of several medical works and apparently, as a result of this, Eliot finds a niche in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. As will be seen later these works were written by another John Elliot, M.D., a native of Somerset, who practised in London.

Sir John Eliot of Peebles, “Knight and Baronet and Doctor of Physic,” was the only son and heir of Thomas Eliot, W.S., Chapel Hill, Peebles. The latter was appointed, in 1739, Agent and Solicitor to H.R.H. Frederick Prince of Wales who was also Lord High Steward of Scotland. Thomas Eliot married Mary, only daughter of the Reverend Thomas Davidson of Dundee, and sister of William Davidson, Esq., of Muirhouse, near Edinburgh, who erected the aforesaid monument to Sir John Eliot at Hatfield, Hertfordshire. John was born in

## R. W. Innes Smith

Edinburgh in 1736, his father dying when he was only a few years old. His mother married, for the second time, the Reverend Thomas Randall of Dundee. John was apprenticed to a surgeon, and, later, appears to have become surgeon's mate to a privateer. The death of his Chief raised him to the surgeoncy of the ship. Prize-money followed and he returned to London to commence practice as a physician. On 6th November 1759, there is the following entry in the records of the University of St Andrews:—"Conferred the degree of Doctor of Medicine on Mr John Eliot, practitioner in physic



SIR JOHN ELIOT, Bart., M.D.

*From a miniature in the possession of Miss Beatrice M. Eliot, Cavarra, Ramsgate.*

upon examination, the Faculty of Arts having conferred the degree in Arts." In September 1762, he was admitted L.R.C.P. of London.

One of his earliest London friends was his fellow countryman Sir William Duncan, Baronet, M.D., who was then a fashionable doctor in London and Physician to George III. Sir William Duncan was apparently the first Scottish Physician to be created a Baronet. He was the second son of Alexander Duncan of Lundie, Provost of Dundee, and was born at Lundie, 19th June 1707, his mother being Isabella, daughter of Sir Patrick Murray, second Baronet of Ochtertyre. He graduated at Rheims in 1729, having studied under Boerhaave at Leyden.

## Sir John Eliot, Bart., M.D., of Peebles

He later graduated M.D. St Andrews *ad eundem* 1751, becoming L.R.C.P. London in 1756. At the accession of George III. in 1760, he was appointed Physician-in-Ordinary to the King, and in 1764 he was created Baronet. In 1763 he married Mary Tufton, daughter of Sackville, Earl of Thanet. Duncan died at Naples in 1774 and was buried at Hampstead. There is a short sketch of Sir William's life in *Munk's Roll*, but no mention of



PORTRAIT OF SIR WILLIAM AND LADY DUNCAN.

*From a painting by Zoffany, in the possession of the Rt. Honourable Mercer Henderson, Countess of Buckinghamshire.*

the fact that he was uncle of Viscount Duncan of Camperdown, the naval hero. In the life of Admiral Duncan he is only just mentioned. At Camperdown, Dundee, there is a portrait of Sir William and Lady Duncan by Zoffany, and I am very grateful to the Right Honourable Mercer Henderson, Countess of Buckinghamshire, for obtaining the photograph of this beautiful painting which apparently has never been reproduced. The story goes that he had purchased a large tract of land in Florida. In the picture Lady Mary is probably remonstrating with him over the foolishness of the investment. Duncan was giving up

## R. W. Innes Smith

practice to go abroad (possibly to Florida) and he gave Eliot many introductions to his patients, eventually transferring all his practice to him.

On 19th October 1771, Eliot married the well-known beauty Grace Dalrymple, daughter of Hew Dalrymple, Attorney-General of Grenada. From this union there was one child who died in infancy. He divorced her in 1774, obtaining £12,000 damages against Viscount Valencia with whom she eloped. Later, she lived with the Prince of Wales, having a son by him in 1782. Ultimately she went to France, becoming a notorious courtesan, (*Vide* Eliot, *Dictionary of National Biography*, for sketch of her Life.) Eliot was knighted on 31st May 1776. George III. had a personal dislike of Sir John Eliot, but Lord George Germaine, Sir John's friend, succeeded in wringing a Baronetcy out of his Majesty for Eliot, the King remarking, "Well, My Lord, since you desire it, let it be, but remember he shall not be my physician." "No, Sir," answered Lord George, "He shall be my physician and Your Majesty's Baronet."

As a physician in London he was very successful, earning, it is said, £5000 a year. His clientele included large numbers of ladies who were fascinated by his manners and address. He entertained lavishly and was a great spender, though in his will he directed that his funeral expenses should not exceed £20. In the matter of fees he did not spare the wealthy, but gave much gratuitous service to the poor. He had the patronage of Madame Schulenburg, daughter of Countess Schulenburg, Duchess of Kendal, who had been mistress of George I. Sir John Eliot's personal friends included many artistic and literary people of the period. James MacPherson, the translator of *Ossian*, was a close friend, and is mentioned in his will. MacPherson published a translation of the *Iliad* in 1773. This was severely handled by the critics, and it was said that Eliot used to carry round a copy and boost it to his patients. Amongst other well-known names mentioned in his will are the fourth Earl of Orford; Caleb Whitfoord, diplomatist; Thomas Astle, antiquary; James Townley, the dramatist; John Armstrong, physician; Dr James Douglas, divine, antiquary, and artist; John Henderson, the actor; Mrs Frances Abingdon, the actress; Mr Michie, Director of the East India Company; and Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore.

His uncle, William Davidson, who erected the monument at Hatfield, was a brother of Mary Davidson, mother of Sir John.

## Sir John Eliot, Bart., M.D., of Peebles

He was a wealthy Scottish merchant of Rotterdam, who amassed a fortune and purchased, in 1776, the Barony of Muirhouse near Edinburgh. He died in 1795, aged 81 years, and was interred in Cramond Parish Church. The name is perpetuated in the village of Davidson's Mains near Edinburgh. The Reverend Thomas Randall succeeded Davidson in 1795 and took the name of Randall Davidson and was the ancestor of the late Archbishop Lord Davidson. Sir John died 7th November 1786 (not 1787 as appears on the monumental inscription) his age being given as *circa* 50 S.P. legit. He possessed an estate in Peeblesshire, which was known as Eliot's Park. He bought up several blocks of land on which a small farm house was built. This property remained in the Eliot family until 1919, when it was purchased for £1850 by the town of Peebles.

Munk and the *Dictionary of National Biography* attribute the following works to Sir John Eliot:—

1. *Philosophical Observations on the Senses of Vision and Hearing, to which are added a Treatise on the Harmonic Sounds, and an Essay on Combustion and Animal Heat.* By John Elliot, Apothecary. It is dedicated to F. S. Simmons, M.D., and dated 4th November 1779, from Carnebie Market, London.

2. *Complete Collection of the Works of John Fothergill, with an Account of His Life.* By John Elliot, M.D. The Preface is dated 20th June 1781, from Carnebie Market, and in this he thanks Dr Simmons for the use of his library.

3. *Medical Pocket Book.* By John Elliot, M.D. This is dated 12th August 1781, from Great Marlborough Street, and is dedicated to Sir John Pringle. A third edition appeared in 1791.

4. *Account of Nature and Medicinal Virtues of Principal Mineral Waters.* By John Elliot, M.D. This is dated 1781, and has an advertisement from Newman Street.

5. *Elements of the Branches of Natural Philosophy connected with Medicine.* By John Elliot, M.D., 1782.

It is quite certain that the author of these works was not Sir John Eliot but another John Elliot who was an apothecary in practice in London, and obtained the M.D. *circa* 1780. He was tried for the attempted murder of Mary Boydell and was acquitted. At the trial his friend, Dr F. S. Simmons, declared that he was insane. He died in prison in 1781, his age being given as *circa* 42. He left an autobiography, which was printed. A copy is in the British Museum.

## R. W. Innes Smith

I have been fortunate in being able to trace a miniature portrait of Sir John Eliot in the possession of Miss Eliot of Ramsgate, a photograph of which she very kindly sent me.

There are two wills of Sir John Eliot, one in Edinburgh in which he disposes of the Peebles property, and one in Somerset House, in which he disposes of his goods and chattels. Although he left no legitimate issue, he left a son and several daughters illegitimate, and he makes generous provision for these, their parents, and other ladies in his wills, those inheriting the land at Peebles to take the name of Eliot. In the will at Somerset House he leaves many interesting items, such as watches, Bibles, gold-headed canes, etc., to his close friends. To Walter Farquhar (later Sir Walter Farquhar), he leaves "my head of Sir William Duncan." To his son in India he leaves his estate in Peebles; his eldest daughter to have £150 a year during her minority; to her mother £80, and to his six other children small annuities; and the same to six other ladies. Nor did he forget his divorced wife. To his uncle, William Davidson, he left his books, prints, etc., and his house and furniture on condition that he paid Mrs Grace Dalrymple an annuity of £200. If he did not comply with this condition, the gift to be sold and the price to be added to the residue of the estate, and the whole to go to his daughters.

Sir John Eliot cannot be said to have been a physician of any great merit, but he was a Scot possessed of personality and made good in London. He had many friends in all classes of the community. Thomas Evans, the editor of *Rabelais*, in his dedication to Sir John Eliot, expresses his appreciation of his character in the following words: "Because, like Rabelais, you possess the rare Talents of lengthening and gladdening Life, which, though you exert in the Palace of a Prince, your Humanity and Liberality you give with Joy to the Cottage of the Peasant."

BIBLIOGRAPHY.—*Munk's Roll of the Royal College of Physicians*, vol. ii. *Dictionary of National Biography*. *Nichol's Literary Illustrations*, vol. viii., pp. 240-241. *Notes and Queries*, 3rd series, x., pp. 161-162. *Buchan's History of Peeblesshire*. *Life of Admiral Duncan*, by the Earl of Camperdown, 1898. *Works of François Rabelais*, translated by M. Le Du Chat and others. Edited by T. Evans, 1784. 4 vols.